

Town of Wenham

Community Preservation Plan

Open Space

Background

For The Town of Wenham, there are many advantages to open space preservation and acquisition, all of which culminate in ensuring that our community remains the unique and special place it is for us today and for future generations.

Wenham is a semi-rural suburban community that has maintained much of its small town appeal through the efforts of benevolent land owners, a concerned and vigilant citizenry and an active town government. The vast majority of the town is zoned for residential use, thus eliminating the threat of large business and industrial development. While residential development has increased since the end of WW II, Wenham has grown at a much slower rate than adjacent communities. However, as undeveloped land in the region becomes scarcer, development pressures in the town will most certainly increase. This potential for increased development would irreparably alter the Town's character and would dramatically increase demands on its infrastructure and Town services. Consequently, Wenham is faced with the challenge of preserving existing open space and positioning itself to acquire privately-owned land that may become available in the future.

Justification for preserving open space, at a time of development pressure, results in interdependent benefits:

- Open space affords recreation, density control, environmental education and the ability to enjoy healthful walks and beautiful views, as well as opportunities for quiet relaxation and closeness to nature. Most important, balanced open spaces become part of a community's character and identity.
- The environmental benefits of conserved open space, such as wetlands and floodplains, ensure the continued operation of vital natural functions that prevent altering or damaging Wenham's water supply, aquifer zones and watershed districts. Open space preserves and protects the wide diversity of plant and wildlife species and the continued operation of those natural processes which are necessary for survival, including air and water purification, flood control, water storage and climate control.

- Open space preservation has a neutral tax impact on the town's operating budget. While preserved open space requires very little expenditure of town funds, residential development of the same land would typically require more town services (schools, fire, police) than is collected in real estate taxes.
- Open space preservation is also a prime factor in maintaining and enhancing real estate values in desirable communities like Wenham.

Wenham has a long history of open space preservation. From the time of its founding in 1643 until the late 19th Century, Wenham was primarily an agricultural community made up of cultivated fields, pastures and wood lots. With the rise of wealth in the second half of the 19th Century, well to do families discovered the beautiful terrain of Wenham and its proximity to Boston. Many large agricultural properties were converted to country estates with landscaped grounds and equestrian trails. Since WW II many of these estates have been converted to other uses while maintaining their undeveloped or natural character. These include Mullen Advertising, Ledyard Farm and Iron Rail.

There is still however significant potential for development in Wenham. A study performed in 1988 by the town determined that "there are 72 parcels in Wenham which could be subdivided into approximately 375 – 400 single-family house lots." (OLD DATA!!!!)

Wenham has one major open space organization. The Hamilton-Wenham Land Trust currently controls or has easements on **XX acres** of open land in Wenham. Other organizations involved with open space preservation include The Trustees of Reservations, Mass Audubon Society and the Essex Greenbelt Association.

Resources

The CPA defines open space to include, but not be limited to:

- Aquifers and recharge areas.
- Watershed and wetlands land.
- Grasslands and fields.
- Agricultural land
- Forest land.
- River, stream, lake and pond frontage.
- Beaches.
- Land to protect scenic vistas.
- Land for wildlife or nature preserves.
- Recreational land.

In general, open space, as defined by CPA, is considered to be land that is maintained in a natural state and available to be used for passive recreation.

The following is a partial inventory of Wenham's open space. Further details can be found in the Open Space and Recreation Plan (2001).

585 acres permanently protected conservation land publicly owned by the Wenham Conservation Commission, Beverly Conservation Commission, Wenham Water Department, Salem-Beverly Water Supply Board, and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management.

609 acres of permanent protected conservation land privately owned by The Trustees of Reservations, Massachusetts Audubon Society, Essex County Greenbelt Association, and the Hamilton-Wenham Open Land Trust.

277 acres of land under permanent Conservation Restriction on six estates and 44 acres at Parson's Hill.

236 acres of agricultural and forestry land on nine farms under the temporary protection of Chapter 61A tax classification.

55 acres of forestry land on two properties under the temporary protection of Chapter 61A tax classification.

93 acres of recreational land on two golf courses under the temporary protection of Chapter 61B tax classification.

39 acres of undeveloped town-owned land with no protection from development.

80 acres of town-owned land in the mixed-use Iron rail property, including three soccer fields, a highway department garage, a gymnasium, a Boy Scout barn, a ropes course, a cemetery site and undeveloped forest and wetlands. There is no restriction on development on this site.

One privately-owned (Tea House - but open to the public) and two town-owned playgrounds totaling 24 acres, and a 7-acre school site.

A seven-acre cemetery, a 36-acre airport site which remains largely undeveloped, and a 318-acre college campus with moderate development.

Needs

As Wenham faces the future, the Town needs to continue its historic tradition of protecting and acquiring open space by focusing on the following:

- Preservation of open space parcels that are significant because of their visibility, size, history or location.
- Preservation of working agricultural land.
- Enhancement of current lands, especially open spaces that are contiguous to existing Town-owned and privately owned conservation land.
- Linkages that expand and enhance the trail and path system connecting open space and recreational resources throughout the Town.
- Protection of our surface and groundwater quantity and quality through protection of wells, aquifers, watershed and groundwater recharge areas.

The primary natural resource issues facing Wenham as it looks to the future are:

- Certain parcels of open land should be preserved or expanded because of their size or their significance as potential links in the existing open space network. The benefits for passive and active recreation are obvious but additional open spaces are needed to protect groundwater and surface water quality, minimize erosion and runoff and preserve wildlife habitat.
- Maintaining open spaces for agricultural use to retain the town's semi-rural character and to enrich the community with this living link to our shared past.
- Expand and enhance access to ponds, lakes and waterways in town to provide greater utilization and enjoyment of these natural resources.

Possibilities

CPA funds for open space may be used for the following:

- Acquisition.
- Creation, preservation, rehabilitation, or restoration of open space.
- Purchase of land, easements or restrictions to protect a variety of space.
- Use of CPA funds to leverage the purchase/preservation of open space.

These open spaces could include:

- Existing and future water supply areas.
- Agricultural and forest lands.
- Wetlands and floodplains.
- Wildlife habitat and nature preserves.

- Space for active and passive recreation uses, such as playgrounds, or athletic fields for non-commercial youth and adult sports.
- Community gardens, parks or trails.

The Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan evaluates the interests of the community, prioritizes open space and recreational needs and identifies priority open space parcels for potential Town acquisition. This Plan has historically guided Town officials in making open space acquisition decisions based upon clearly defined criteria.

Examples of potential projects include:

- Purchase land for water supply use or water supply protection.
- Purchase or protect land that is vital to the town identity and character.
- Purchase conservation land. Several parcels are identified in the above mentioned Town Plans.

Goals

The CPC has developed the following open space goals. Proposals brought before the CPC may receive preference for funding if they accomplish some or all of the following goals:

The Land

- Protect open space through acquisition.
- Purchase and/or facilitate conservation easements and restrictions.
- Obtain rights of first refusal to purchase land.

The Water

- Protect water and wetland resources, flood control areas and flood storage capacity.
- Improve and expand public access to water resources
- Preserve and enhance surface and groundwater quantity and quality through protection of wells, aquifers, watershed and groundwater recharge areas, lake and pond frontage.
- Restore those resources that have been degraded or impaired.

Quality of Life

- Promote the acquisition of open space for passive and active recreation and nature-related education.

- Enhance community character through improving the maintenance and the quality and quantity of the Town's shade trees, scenic and historic landscapes.
- Preserve habitat protection and biodiversity.

Open Space Criteria

- Preserved open space should be visible and accessible to the general public for their enjoyment and education.
- Preserved open space should have a unique and/or important significance relating to the town's image, landscape, culture, history or natural environment.
- Preserved open space should be contiguous with other parcels of preserved land.
- Preservation of open space through partnerships with other preservation groups and conservation restrictions.
- Preservation of open space for agricultural use.